

ARC Meeting – Amalgamation Process 25th May 2011

Present: Frankie Berry, Liam O’ Dwyer, Regina O’ Connell, Mark O’ Leary, Liz Mc Lafferty, Loretta Wynne, Catherine Troy, Miriam Mc Nally, Laura Behan, Paula Keenan, Janet O’ Shaughnessy, Michael Dempsey (on behalf of Brenda Egan), John O’ Brien, (INTO), and Judith King

Interpreter: Darren Byrne

Apologies: Shirley Wolverson; Maire Collins (ASTI) Barry Glennon & Declan Keane, (Parents representatives) and Maura Buckley (CIDP).

Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Agreement on Agenda
3. Notes from March 9th Meeting
4. Matters arising not on the agenda
5. Progress report from Liam since last meeting
6. Note to Staff re recent Staff Forum
7. 12th Draft of Education Model
8. Report from Steering Committee
9. Next Steps
10. AOB
11. Date of next Meeting

There was no suggested change to the proposed agenda except to agree to take Items 5 and 6 together. Given that there were no amendments to the minutes or matters arising, the meeting proceeded directly to these items.

Liam’s Progress Report and Note for circulation to Staff

Liam had drafted a document that it was hoped, after editing at this meeting, would be circulated to all the Staff. Many of the points of progress since the last meeting were incorporated into that document.

Liam said that document focused on three areas. Firstly, in the introductory section the mixed views and feelings among many staff in both schools about whether or not to proceed, is addressed. The document records the decision at Steering Group and ARC committee to ask CIDP to resolve a number of areas causing concern and to bring back to the table more clear data. The first of these areas of concern was jobs, possible job losses and redundancy/retirement options.

The second section in the draft Note to Staff details the outcome and clarifications received at a number of meetings with Union representatives. The third section reports on the meeting between NCSE, Liam and the two Principals. The final section deals with the issues pertaining to the Location discussion and acknowledges that the ball is now in the CIDP court to make a concrete proposal regarding location which it is hoped will be presented to the Steering Group and the ARC committee in September.

➤ **Jobs, Job Losses, Unions**

The ARC Members then proceeded through the document and a number of changes were recommended. Some of these points led to further clarification. For example, it was felt that the document ought to include temporary teachers as also a vulnerable group with CIDs and that CIDs do have panel rights. Also temporary teachers with 5 years in the job are in a stronger position than temporary teachers with less than that. Secondments are simply that: the actual jobs belong to the original teachers. It was clarified that all three temporary wholetime teachers in St. Mary's are secondment replacements. St. Mary's also clarified that the teacher who had recently applied for a career break had in fact received approval since the last meeting.

It was stressed that from a Union perspective the main concern is to ensure there is no loss of work. The whole Panel structure which has been 'working under the radar' for many years now has engendered significant debate in recent months but it has proved itself as a facility to protect jobs. The review of learning support in mainstream schools has just been completed with as yet no loss of numbers. Special schools will have their own review quite soon and that review may influence the consultation process here. A special case needs to be made regarding teachers who are also Deaf as their re-deployment will be more difficult.

In response to some of the input from the Union some Steering Group Members wished to stress that should a teacher be put on a panel that still means they lose their job here. Liam said that there may in fact be little, if any, loss of jobs in the teaching area as there are two retiring teachers this year, others in the next few years and 3 staff have already declared interest in being put on the panel. A number of others have expressed interest in a retirement package if the terms were attractive enough.

Some of the non-teaching staff were struck by the omission of any reference to their situation in the document. A number are on permanent contracts but there isn't anything like the same level of protection that teachers are afforded. Some are also not members of any union. Liam stressed that non-union staff will be afforded the same terms and conditions as unionised members. This group of staff requested a separate meeting with Liam to discuss the particulars of their situation. This meeting will be arranged by two of the non-teaching staff present.

One of the Teachers from St. Mary's wished to say that the school endeavoured to work a team approach and that they would aspire to there not being any forced redundancy because every staff member was valued and all are needed to help make the school work more effectively. St. Joseph's staff wished to endorse this aspiration.

➤ **Report on Meeting with NCSE**

Liam reported on the meeting with the NCSE and spoke to the summary of it which was contained in the note to staff. Some corrections/amendments were noted:

- CIRC should be spelt SERC – Special Education Review Committee
- There is a need to justify the pupil retention beyond 18 not 19 as stated in the draft text
- Possibly 3 staff will be seconded to the Centre for Deaf Education
- The Steering Committee wish to record their caution about the numbers being suggested for the Preschool and the PLCs . Those currently in charge of PLCs are sure that the numbers could be increased but that would demand a definite policy of promotion of outreach, staff funding etc. “It will not just happen” said one. NCSE suggest that funding for this end of the proposal would be sourced from FAS or its equivalent (should FAS be disbanded).

➤ **Location, Contacts with the Department**

There has been a long drawn out dispute with the Department of Education's Building Section regarding Colaiste Mhuire so it is not the most opportune time to raise the issues of location and funding. However, once this prior dispute is sorted, Liam will meet with the officials to begin discussions about the location issue. Liam then hopes to be in a position to put a formal proposal from CIDP to the Autumn Meetings of both the Steering Group and the ARC Committee.

12th Draft of Education Model

We then proceeded to discuss the 12th Draft of the Education Model. Electronic versions had been emailed the week before and hard copies were circulated at the meeting. The ARC Members made a number of queries about and/or suggestions re the 12th Draft. These included:

➤ **Numbers of Deaf Teachers**

Clarity was sought about the numbers of teacher who are Deaf and what their status is. In St. Joseph's 2 CIDs are deaf; in St. Mary's 2 temporary wholetime staff are deaf; 1 Substitute teacher in St. Joseph's is deaf and 3 of the substitute teachers whom St. Mary's employ are deaf. It was suggested that it might be worthwhile to include the status of staff in the table on page 3.

On a related but separate matter some Members of ARC disagreed with the inclusion of the sentence on the previous page, page 3 which says that 'the schools are committed to employing teachers who are

Deaf or hard of hearing'. They believe it is a 'discriminatory' position and should at least have an addendum added which would say, 'and who are suitably qualified for the job'. Others believed it should be omitted altogether. Liam disagreed with not stating it as the preference but would rephrase it given the comments at the meeting.

➤ **Children who originate from other countries**

Again on page 2 there is reference to 10% of the student population originating from countries other than Ireland. Yet on the Appendix on Pg 19 the figure is quoted as 24%. We need to state consistent figures.

➤ **Qualifications**

Again on page 2 both schools wished to correct the figures cited about teacher qualifications. On behalf of St. Joseph's it was stated that 72% of Staff have the Diploma in Deaf Education and a further 25% have the Diploma in Special Needs Education. Some have a Masters in same. Only 2% have no additional qualifications. 90% of the Staff in St. Mary's have additional qualifications, it was stated. It was queried if ARC would like to state an aspiration of 100% staff qualified with Teacher of the Deaf qualification. Others said that because the course was only now available in Birmingham that raised serious logistical obstacles.

➤ **Adequacy or not of facilities**

Returning again to page 3 there was a query about the statement in the final paragraph about the adequacy of school buildings. Is it suggested that they are adequate if an amalgamation is affected? Or is it that they are adequate for 3-5 yrs without amalgamation? Liam said the latter was what was intended and he would include a clarifying sentence. The reason for including it all, he added, was to signal that the Department will have to invest considerably in significant maintenance in three to five years anyway should an amalgamation not happen.

➤ **Staffing Requirements**

On page 5 regarding Staffing Requirements one Member wondered if it needs to be stated that two Administration Principals is what is being sought. Another wondered if it would in fact be realistic to share a post such as the HSL, given that the workload would double if the amalgamation were to go ahead and the distances involved regarding liaison with parents would be countrywide. Other Members said that we also need to be careful as the current arrangement of releasing one staff member as the HSL is an internal arrangement. Whilst the Department know about it and commended the work of it in the Whole School Evaluation they did not allocate us the position as we do not fit the normal criterion for the appointment.

It was queried if the document should state the qualifications that would be required of the Primary Principal. For example the INTO model is that Primary Principals should be primary education qualified.

Since December last in mainstream education post primary qualified teachers cannot be employed as a Primary Principal.

➤ **Children with additional disabilities**

On the Table on page 13-14 at the last meeting it was suggested that we add a category 'No hearing loss but with severe language disorder'. However, on reflection it was suggested that these children are already covered in Specific Speech and Language Disorder. There was also some concern about the category 'Severe Emotional Disturbance'. Unfortunately the schools have no psychiatric reports as yet. Staff experience indicates that there is a higher than average number of students with mental health issues, including self-harm and suicidal behaviour. Janet agreed to write a paragraph to indicate something of these challenges.

➤ **No of Class Periods**

Returning to page 5 where the draft states that there are 33 class periods. In fact now, on account of the Croke Park agreement, there are actually 34 class periods. In fact it was suggested that this whole area would need to be reworked in that some of the time allocation suggested is no longer accepted by the Department of Education.

➤ **Number of Pupils**

Finally some Members asked if the Document would continue to base its figures on a future increased student population. One Member suggested that the Draft include reference to a paper which is to be presented at the IATSE Conference on the 10th of June. That paper will quote figures which indicate that pupils are seeking a return to special education schools after their mainstream experience.

Liam agreed to make the changes and circulate the next draft.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be on the **12th of October, 2011 in St. Joseph's Hall from 9.15-10.45**